

Appearance

7 Biblical Principles Regarding Personal Appearance

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Principle #1—By our appearance we make a public statement about ourselves, our priorities, and our goals.

We give a visual image by which others can form a concept of what we are all about.

Luke 16:19—“*Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day.*”

James 2:2-3—“*A man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, / and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes.*”

The appearance of the wealthy men in both these texts is designed to convey importance. A modern equivalent might include wearing clothes for their designer labels.

Our facial expressions also project essential clues to others about the kind of people we are.

Prov 27:19—“*As in water face reflects face, So the heart of man reflects man.*”

Our face may reflect an inner person who is full of joy.

Prov 15:13—“*A joyful heart makes a cheerful face.*”

By contrast, our faces may reflect a very different kind of inner man.

Scripture speaks of “haughty eyes” (Prov 21:4), a “brazen face” (Prov 7:13), “lofty eyes,” “eyelids raised in arrogance” (Prov 30:13) and the “bold face” of the wicked (Prov 21:29).

God is personally offended at the pride reflected in such hard self-centered countenances.

He says in Isa 2:11—“*The proud look of man will be abased, And the loftiness of man will be humbled, And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.*”

Principle #2—Our appearance can intentionally and hypocritically create a false impression of ourselves.

Jesus attacked this kind of insincerity in Mt 6:16-18—“*Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. / But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face / so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret.*”

Christ condemned the false image of holiness conjured up by the Pharisees when they neglected their appearance in order to look gaunt.

They were deceiving others into thinking that their dedicated fasting and commitment to religious self-deprivation had actually taken a toll on their health.

Principle #3—Appearance can be used in sinful ways to manipulate and defraud others.

A person can intentionally dress in a way that appeals to other people’s lust.

Prov 7:10—“*Behold, a woman comes to meet him, Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.*”

This woman has proclaimed herself to be a harlot by the revealing immodesty of her clothes.

Her appearance advertises her availability to engage in immorality, offering herself to love and be loved.

But it's all fraudulent, cunning, and manipulative, having nothing to do with love, and everything to do with lust.

Her immodest appearance is specifically designed to stimulate the attention and interest of those she intends to use for her own selfish purposes.

In Prov 6:25 a father warns his son that the appearance of women like this is such a dangerous trap that he must even guard his eyes—*“Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her **catch** you with her eyelids.”*

Job said—*“I Have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?”* (31:1).

Men are just as capable of manipulating women through their appearance as women are of men.

Ezekiel 23:12 speaks of a woman who represents Israel—*“She **lusted** after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, **magnificently dressed**, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men.”*

The current rash of drooping beltlines among teenage boys illustrates this same tendency to manipulate through a fraudulent appeal to lust.

Christian men and women have no business engaging in this sort of worldly conduct.

As Paul told young Timothy (II Tim 2:22)—*“Flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”*

Principle #4—Because of sin, nakedness is shameful.

Before the Fall it wasn't like that.

Gen 2:25—*“The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*

But the Fall changed everything.

Gen 3:7—*“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.”*

As a result of sin's effect on the human heart, public nudity has become shameful.

In Jer 13:26, God uses the shame of nudity as a picture of the utter humiliation to which He intends to subject Judah because of their sin—*“I Myself have also stripped your skirts off over your face, That your shame may be seen.”*

This is such an important issue that in Exod 20:26, God forbid Israel from building an elevated altar, telling the priests, *“You shall not go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.”*

Even more specifically Isa 20:4 says—*“The king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the **shame** of Egypt.”*

Anyone in the market for a bathing suit would do well to read this beforehand (sumo wrestlers too).

Principle #5—Christians must avoid causing others to stumble by their appearance.

1 Cor 8:12—*“By sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.”*

Although this passage has to do with non-moral issues such as eating meat offered to idols, it demonstrates the seriousness of wounding a fellow believer's conscience.

The way we dress is not simply a private activity—it can profoundly affect anyone else who sees us, even causing him/her to sin.

Our appearance should be designed to strengthen others morally and spiritually, not tear them down by leading them unnecessarily into temptation.

Otherwise, we sin not only against our brothers & sisters in Christ; we sin against Christ. In Mt 5:28-29 Jesus said—“ *I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. / And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*”

How could a Christian feel comfortable about wearing something that could make others commit mental adultery?

How could he/she callously tempt them with a sin that is so serious, Jesus said they are in danger of hell because it?

To answer, “The problem is in his mind, not my clothing” would demonstrate a selfish, heartless callousness that cares nothing for the welfare of others.

Principle #6—Beautiful appearance is a good thing created by God.

I Sam 16:12 says David was “*ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance.*”

In verse 7 God had told Samuel, “*God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*”

God had made David a man after His own heart; but He also gave him an outward appearance that would be attractive to the people of Israel, whose main concern (like that of most people) was with outward (not inward) reality.

In Ezek 16, God is portrayed as tenderly beautifying Israel in an act of His love for her.

Ezek 16:10-13—“*I also clothed you with embroidered cloth, and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. / And I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands, and a necklace around your neck. / I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. / Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty.*”

God uses beauty to bring couples together through mutual attraction.

In SOS 2:9, a young woman is admiring the appearance of the man she has come to love, and she loves the fact that he enjoys looking at her as well:

“*My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he is standing behind our wall, He is looking through the windows, He is peering through the lattice.*”

He feels the same way about her and is captured by her beauty (SOS 2:14)—“*O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, In the secret place of the steep pathway, Let me see your form, Let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, And your form is lovely.*”

After the couple is married (in SOS 3:6), each one continues to be engrossed in the other’s attractive appearance, as they fall deeper and deeper in love.

Principle #7—But outward beauty must be secondary to inward beauty.

Solomon’s chronicle doesn’t allow us to follow the couple into their old age, but they would inevitably have lost their outward beauty.

At the age of 94, my mother looked in the mirror, contemplating all her wrinkles and sagging flesh, and said, “Old age is ugly!”

The stark fact of the matter is that every one of us, if we live long enough, is doomed to become ugly in our old age.

But Christians have the confidence that this isn't the end of the story.

Eph 5:27 says that Christ has sanctified us, *“that He might present to Himself the church in all her **glory**, having no **spot** or **wrinkle** or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.”*

Rev 19:8 says of the Church in the end times—*“It was given to her to **clothe** herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”*

Our resurrected bodies will be without spot or wrinkle, and our clothing will at last justify the old saying that “clothes make the man.”

I Pet 1:4 says that our eternal inheritance is *“imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”*

Meanwhile, it is incumbent on Christians to increasingly change their focus from outward beauty to inward beauty.

2 Cor 4:18—*“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

Peter applies this principle in a very practical way to Christians here and now.

1 Pet 3:3-4—*“Let not your **adornment** be merely **external**—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; / but let it be the **hidden** person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”*

Christian couples who can't make the transition from attraction to each other's outward beauty (which will inevitably fade) to admiring one another's inward beauty are headed toward a middle-aged crisis that might even end in divorce.

This is becoming more and more important because of today's youth-oriented culture.

Peter instructs us to dress modestly and concentrate on becoming inwardly beautiful.

The women about whom he was writing often died their hair purple or even with a rainbow of colors, trying to attract attention to themselves by their appearance.

They piled it high on their heads, sticking jewels, gold and silver pins, and even tortoise shells into it, or order to display their wealth on their heads.

Some wore imported blond wigs from Germany that were scented with perfume from India and decorated with diamonds and emeralds.

You knew the status of a woman and her husband by looking at her hair.

So Peter says in essence, “Now work on your inside, rather than your outside.”

Stop trying to attract other people's attention, and become the kind of person whose inward beauty is attractive and pleasing to God.

Anything that we do for the purpose of calling attention to ourselves (whether it's over-dressing as those women did, under-dressing so that we attract others with our bare skin, or under-dressing the way the Pharisees did to artificially make themselves appear gaunt and poor) reflects an over-emphasis on outward appearance and an under-emphasis on real spiritual beauty within in hearts.

Final conclusion: Dress fashionably enough so that you won't stand out, but dress modestly, and keep your priorities straight.